

1986 Apology to Indigenous Peoples

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured.

We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality.

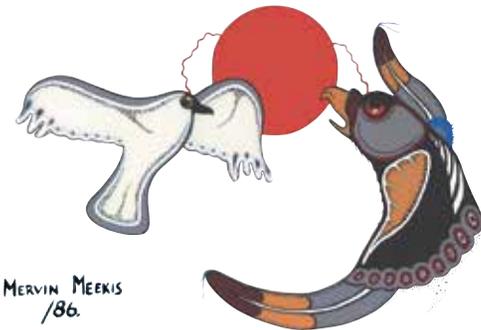
We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ.

We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the gospel.

We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result, you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by God to be.

We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.

The Right Rev. Bob Smith
General Council 1986
The United Church of Canada



The Meeting of the Eagle and the Dove by Mervin Meekis, an artist from Sandy Lake Reserve who died in 2000, was presented to the 31st General Council 1986 during the consideration of the Apology to Indigenous Peoples.

The 1988 Response

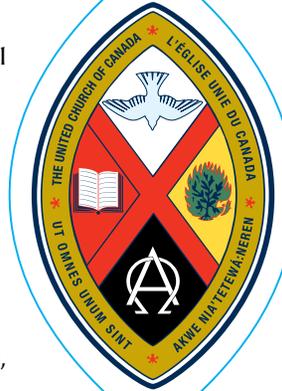
In 1988, at the 32nd General Council, the Indigenous church acknowledged the apology, expressing its hope that the church would live into its words. Mrs. Edith Memnook, a representative of the All Native Circle Conference, said:

The Apology made to the Native People of Canada by The United Church of Canada in Sudbury in August 1986 has been a very important step forward. It is heartening to see that The United Church of Canada is a forerunner in making this Apology to Native People. The All Native Circle Conference has now acknowledged your Apology. Our people have continued to affirm the teachings of the Native way of life. Our spiritual teachings and values have taught us to uphold the Sacred Fire; to be guardians of Mother Earth, and strive to maintain harmony and peaceful coexistence with all peoples.

We only ask of you to respect our Sacred Fire, the Creation, and to live in peaceful coexistence with us. We recognize the hurts and feelings will continue amongst our people, but through partnership and walking hand in hand, the Indian spirit will eventually heal. Through our love, understanding, and sincerity the brotherhood and sisterhood of unity, strength, and respect can be achieved.

The Native People of The All Native Circle Conference hope and pray that the Apology is not symbolic but that these are the words of action and sincerity. We appreciate the freedom for culture and religious expression. In the new spirit this Apology has created, let us unite our hearts and minds in the wholeness of life that the Great Spirit has given us.

1988 Record of Proceedings, p. 79



To former students of United Church Indian Residential Schools, and to their families and communities:

From the deepest reaches of your memories, you have shared with us your stories of suffering from our church's involvement in the operation of Indian Residential Schools. You have shared the personal and historic pain that you still bear, and you have been vulnerable yet again. You have also shared with us your strength and wisdom born of the life-giving dignity of your communities and traditions and your stories of survival.

In response to our church's commitment to repentance, I spoke these words of apology on behalf of the General Council Executive on Tuesday, October 27, 1998:

"As Moderator of The United Church of Canada, I wish to speak the words that many people have wanted to hear for a very long time. On behalf of The United Church of Canada, I apologize for the pain and suffering that our church's involvement in the Indian Residential School system has caused. We are aware of some of the damage that this cruel and ill-conceived system of assimilation has perpetrated on Canada's First Nations peoples. For this we are truly and most humbly sorry.

"To those individuals who were physically, sexually, and mentally abused as students of the Indian Residential Schools in which The United Church of Canada was involved, I offer you our most sincere apology. You did nothing wrong. You were and are the victims of evil acts that cannot under any circumstances be justified or excused.

"We know that many within our church will still not understand why each of us must bear the scar, the blame for this horrendous period in Canadian history. But the truth is, we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors, and therefore, we must also bear their burdens."

Our burdens include dishonouring the depths of the struggles of First Nations peoples and the richness of your gifts. We seek God's forgiveness and healing grace as we take steps toward building respectful, compassionate, and loving relationships with First Nations peoples.

We are in the midst of a long and painful journey as we reflect on the cries that we did not or would not hear, and how we have behaved as a church. As we travel this difficult road of repentance, reconciliation, and healing, we commit ourselves to work toward ensuring that we will never again use our power as a church to hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority.

"We pray that you will hear the sincerity of our words today and that you will witness the living out of our apology in our actions in the future."

The Right Rev. Bill Phipps
General Council Executive 1998
The United Church of Canada



Revisions to The United Church of Canada Crest Reflect Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples

The crest is the official signature of The United Church of Canada. It displays our spiritual and historic roots. At the 41st General Council meeting in August 2012, the United Church revised its crest to acknowledge the presence and spirituality of Indigenous Peoples in the church at the time of union and now. The changes in the crest also denote that the church was built on Indigenous land.

Three churches joined together in 1925 to become the United Church and are symbolized in the crest: Congregational churches represented by the Bible, Presbyterian churches by the burning bush, and Methodist churches by the dove.

The background colours of the quadrants reflect four traditional colours of the Indigenous medicine wheel. Each colour represents a different corner of the world and carries specific teachings: yellow for the east, black for the south, red for the west, and white for the north.

The Latin words *ut omnes unum sint* that surround the symbols on the crest mean "That all may be one" and are taken from the Gospel of John 17:21.

Within the Indigenous community, the phrase "All my relations" reflects that same inclusive vision of Christ. That phrase is translated into the Mohawk language: Akwe Nia'Tetewá:neren*, seen on the right in the border. Mohawk was chosen because the first documented ministry between Indigenous Peoples and the founding denominations began in 1822 between the Mohawks and Methodist missionaries.

Our crest expresses a desire for unity in the work of the church through the generations and that all will be equally welcome. Through the Creator's love and grace, may it be so.

*aw gway–nyah day day waw–nay renh

For more information, see www.united-church.ca



Old Crest



New Crest